the Ballet and Newfound Freedom

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the Ballet and Newfound Freedom by Brown Eyes Parker

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everything was beautiful at the ballet. . .

The first week of December when El is finally allowed to go out into the world, Mike shows up at the cabin in the woods with an eager look on his face. Hopper sighs when he lets him in because he knows something's up.

"What do you want?" he asks as he lets him in, but he smiles to make sure Mike knows he's not *really* annoyed.

"I was wondering since its safe for El to go out now if I could take her somewhere special," Mike answers, bouncing up and down on the balls of his feet.

Hopper sighs because he knew, he *knew* this was coming. El's inevitable *freedom* had been a huge topic of discussion in previous weeks, Mike had a list of the places he was going to take her when she could finally leave the confines of the cabin.

"What did you have in mind?" he asks after a beat.

"Well. . ." Mike trails off and pulls at the collar of his striped polo shirt. "My parents got tickets to see the Nutcracker Ballet in Indianapolis this weekend and I was wondering if she could go with me. . . with *us* to see it."

"The ballet?" Hopper repeats, furrowing his brow.

"Yeah, it's this ballet group from New York," Mike replies. "They're coming for one night only and it's a big deal. Mom thinks El will like it."

Hopper nods, the New York City Ballet is exactly the kind of thing El *would* like. The lavish costumes, the orchestra, getting dressed up to go to the theater. It's something straight out of a television show. She's been so well-behaved, so patient while she waited to *finally* be able to go out into the world and lead a somewhat normal life. He doesn't think he can begrudge her a nice night out.

He doesn't think he can even begrudge *Mike* a night out with her. He's put in his time, making treks out into the woods even when it was freezing cold and he hadn't complained when the only thing they had been able to do was watch sitcoms or play never ending rounds of Monopoly when normal kids their age were sharing Cokes and popcorn at the movie theater.

"Okay," he finally agrees. "She can go with you."

Mike beams. "Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!" he says over and over again.

"E!" Hopper calls. "Mike's here! He has something to ask you!"

El is out in the living room in an instant, she smiles shyly when she sees Mike standing near the doorway. "Hi," she says. "You want to ask me something?"

Mike eagerly shows her the tickets and asks if she wants to go with him, making sure she knows that he already asked for Hopper's permission to take her.

"Did he?" El asks, looking at her adopted father for confirmation.

"He did and I said it was okay if you went," Hopper assures her.

El hesitates. "What's the *ballet*?"

"It's another way to tell stories," Hopper explains. "Except they do it through dancing and music, not talking."

"Dancing? Like the way Mike and I dance?"

Hopper laughs. "Not exactly, it's a little more formal than that. I think you'll enjoy it."

El turns to Mike and nods. "I'd like to go with you," she answers.

Mike looks thrilled that she said yes.

After he leaves, Hopper realizes she'll need something nice to wear. He has her try on the dress she wore to the Snowball the year before but she's grown out of it. He sighs and picks up the phone to call Joyce and see if she'll take her out to get a new dress.

She is more than happy to help him out.

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Mid-morning on Friday, El locked herself in her bedroom to get ready to go out. She was due at the Wheeler's around three, because they were going out to dinner before the show. At two-thirty-five, she came out in a berry-colored, velvet dress that fell below her knees and her curly hair pinned to the side with a pair of sparkly star barrettes.

"Do you think Mike will like it?" she asks, anxiously as she straps on Mary Jane's.

Hopper rolls his eyes, Mike is one of the easiest people to please in the world. He practically swoons if El is wearing overalls, there's no doubt in his mind that the boy will *love* the way she looks just like he did the year before when she got dressed up for the Snowball.

He sighs, he doesn't think he's *ready* for the boy/girl thing but he's already in the middle of it and there's nothing he can do about it because the last time he kept Mike and El separated, it didn't go too well. He's learned from that mistake.

When they get to the Wheeler's house, Hopper spots Mike watching for them through the windows. When he sees the car pull into the driveway, the sheer curtains fall back into place and he's down the front porch in a matter of seconds. He waits until the car stops and pulls the passenger door open.

"Hi El," he says.

"Hi Mike," El echoes, unbuckling her seatbelt, she clutches her coat

around her a little tighter before realizing belatedly that Mike is waiting for her to take his hand. She does and he doesn't let her go, even when she's standing beside him.

Any worry Hopper has about letting her go anywhere without him close by disappears. El can certainly take care of herself but Mike will be there to make sure she doesn't get overwhelmed, to make sure she doesn't get scared by strangers and the hustle and bustle of city life. He tells them to have fun, to enjoy themselves and drives away, deciding he's going to enjoy a little freedom himself.

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They go to an Italian restaurant that has linen napkins and glass goblets they even use for *Coke*. El's afraid she'll drop a meatball in her lap or get spaghetti sauce all over her dress or that she'll break something and Ted will have to pay for the damages and then Hopper will have to repay Ted.

Mike senses her anxiety because he covers her hand with his for the umpteenth time that day and squeezes it.

"Everything's going to be fine," he assures her even though he's starting to wish El's first real night out would have been to get pizza and see a movie. He wonders how he got the great idea to bring her into an unrelaxed atmosphere.

Pizza and a movie *could* have been as equally special as seeing the New York City Ballet perform.

He just hopes the evening isn't a complete failure because he can't *bear* for El to be upset or disappointed. He takes a large gulp of soda and hopes for the best as the fizz stings his throat and she fidgets beside him.

Aside from Ted's poor attempt at humor, dinner goes off without a hitch. Nobody spills anything on their nice clothes and all breakable things are left intact. El charms both the older Wheelers with her frequent use of soap opera quotes in conversation.

She tenses up a little bit when the lights dim because it's suddenly

dark but Mike takes her hand and she relaxes. When the curtain rises, El completely forgets they're in a pitch black theater. She is spellbound by the show unfolding before her. She's never seen anything like it and she instantly falls in love with the glittering costumes and the music.

When it's over, she wants to watch it again but Mike tells her that they *have* to leave but he promises to bring her again one day even if they have to go to New York City one day.

They hold hands again on the way home while they drift in and out of sleep, drained from all the excitement of the day.

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The next morning, Hopper makes El breakfast and she informs him that she *loves* the ballet and she *likes* freedom a lot too.

He smiles at her and ruffles her hair, he tells her that although the ballet is not his cup of tea, he does like their newfound freedom too.

The End

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Author's Note:

I don't even know what *this* is although my father might say it's me being pretentious. I hope you guys will tell me what you thought. The stuff with Ted and Karen are them acting like a nuclear family. It's not the way I actually perceive them but for the sake of the flow of the story, I couldn't actually get into *that*. I just thought you should know I put some thought into it before just writing it. The lyrics come from "At the Ballet" from A Chorus Line.

I'll be back with a Christmas story, soon!

Until Next Time!

Love,

Holly, 11/29/2017